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A NOTE ON POSTERS ✤ BY CHARLES H. WOODBURY

THE change that has come in the treatment of posters during the past few years is so marked that even had attention not been drawn to it by the papers, the collecting mania and the various poster exhibitions, it would not fail to be evident to the most careless observer. It is doubtful, however, whether the majority of people have stopped to analyze the change or to realize what such a seemingly unimportant thing may mean. The real difference between the old and the new lies in the fact that instead of a drawing more or less carefully colored, we have now a design presenting the same facts but in an artistic and scientific way. We have long had artistic aspirations, but it is only lately that we have come to see that beauty is not a thing apart, but that it enters into all, dignifying and giving an added value to whatever it touches. We had a dim perception of this fact in our misdirected efforts with dust-pans, milking stools and rolling pins—fortunately our vision has cleared since then and we know that it is not by perverting them from their natural uses, but by more perfectly adapting them to their purposes, that we will make the common things artistic. A poster may not be a picture, but it may be what is equally serious in its own way, a design. It must be, for commercial reasons, simple; but this, instead of being a limitation, is directly in the line of all good art. The love of color is universal, and though our attention may be arrested by a poorly-colored design we are much more likely to remember what has given us pleasure. Since color, then, is the element of our poster most likely to attract and to be felt by the public, it is necessary to give it more careful consideration. The reason for our delight in color seems to be very obscure. Why should one set of vibrations awaken pleasure in us while another leaves us cold? It seems likely that the answer is to be found, not on the physical side at all, but in the purely mental. We rarely, if ever, see one color at a time, and every tint is delicate or crude according to what it is associated with. In this comparison we find our pleasure—it is the perception of a harmony. Like other harmonies the result depends not only on the component parts, but also on their relative proportion. This is so evident that it hardly needs proof, but it explains the power of the Japanese to put seemingly incongruous colors together without a discord resulting. Of the line it is unnecessary to speak, as design is too well understood to make explanations necessary. It has been suggested that the lively interest taken in posters is a fad and will quickly be forgotten. This is probably true to a certain extent, and yet we are not at all likely to give up any real advance we have made. The poster has become an artistic creation and it will remain so.

EDWIN A. ABBEY
Poster for The Holy Grail
Size of the original, 16 in. by 20 in.
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